

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	3414 29th Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Cleveland Park Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	July 28, 2011		Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	11-400	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		New Construction

Owner Robert Bassman seeks the Board's approval for an after-the-fact permit for replacing the front and rear fences at his home, a contributing building to the Cleveland Park Historic District. The house was designed by architect Gilbert Rodier for S.G. Lindholm in 1929.

Project Description

The property had a front yard chain link fence, approximately 6 feet in height, which was in place prior to the owner's purchase of the house. The recent work included replacing that fence with a 6 foot tall aluminum picket fence. The new rear fence is a 6 foot tall board-on-board privacy fence.

Evaluation

The building code requires fences in public space, as well as those built beyond the building restriction line, to comply with public space regulations, which limits front yard fences to 42" in height and a minimum of 50% open. However, this property is quite unusual in that the front fence is located on the owner's property, not within the public space, and there is no building restriction line on this block of 29th Street, which is a block-long, dead-end street extending south from Ordway.

Since neither the public space nor the building restriction line regulations applies here, the Board must consider how the fence affects the character of the streetscape and the Cleveland Park Historic District. Virtually all other houses in Cleveland Park are subject to these regulations, thus the neighborhood maintains a consistency of mostly unfenced front yards with an intermittent, but uniformly low, open fence height. Rear and side yard fences are generally reviewed with more flexibility, even when they are on corner properties, such as the one to the immediate south of the subject property (side fence), the one across the street at the end of 29th (rear fence), both of which face Newark Street, and the house at the northeast corner of 29th and Ordway (side fence).

However, obscuring the view of a historic building or otherwise creating a barrier between the sidewalk and the face of a house is not a compatible treatment for front yard fencing in historic districts. Cleveland Park was established as a suburban oasis, away from the bustle and grime of downtown, incorporating wide and deep lots, extensive vegetation, and even the name "park" in its identity, all of which convey a sense of openness, visual accessibility, and copious amounts of green space. A 6 foot high front yard fence would affect the historic concept behind the neighborhood's development and the clearly established streetscape/front yard pattern that followed.

There is no record of the Board having approved an application for a front yard residential fence of this type. While there are a discreet handful of similar looking fences abutting sidewalks in the neighborhood, they surround historic estates, such as Tregaron (Washington International School), where a fence specifically designed to replicate the historic fence was erected, and the Twin Oaks property. These estates are very different property types than the suburban residential development they abut on Macomb Street, and do not provide precedent for erecting similar fences around suburban houses.

The clear vistas and open views throughout Cleveland Park are important aspects of the historic character of the neighborhood and are worthy of preservation. The applicant should be encouraged to determine if the recently installed fence can be cut down in height to 42" in order to keep what has already been installed. However, if this proves infeasible, the new fence should be removed. If desired, a new permit application for 42" fence can be submitted for immediate staff approval.

The 6 foot rear yard fence is consistent with the building code restrictions on height (which allow up to 7 feet), is consistent with rear yard fences on similar properties throughout the historic district, and raises no preservation concerns.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board direct the applicant to reduce the height of the existing fence to no more than 42" or to remove it, and to approve the rear fence as installed.